

Science and Policy: Establishing New Post-Fire Restoration Programs for Private Lands

South Fork Fire - Watershed Recovery Program

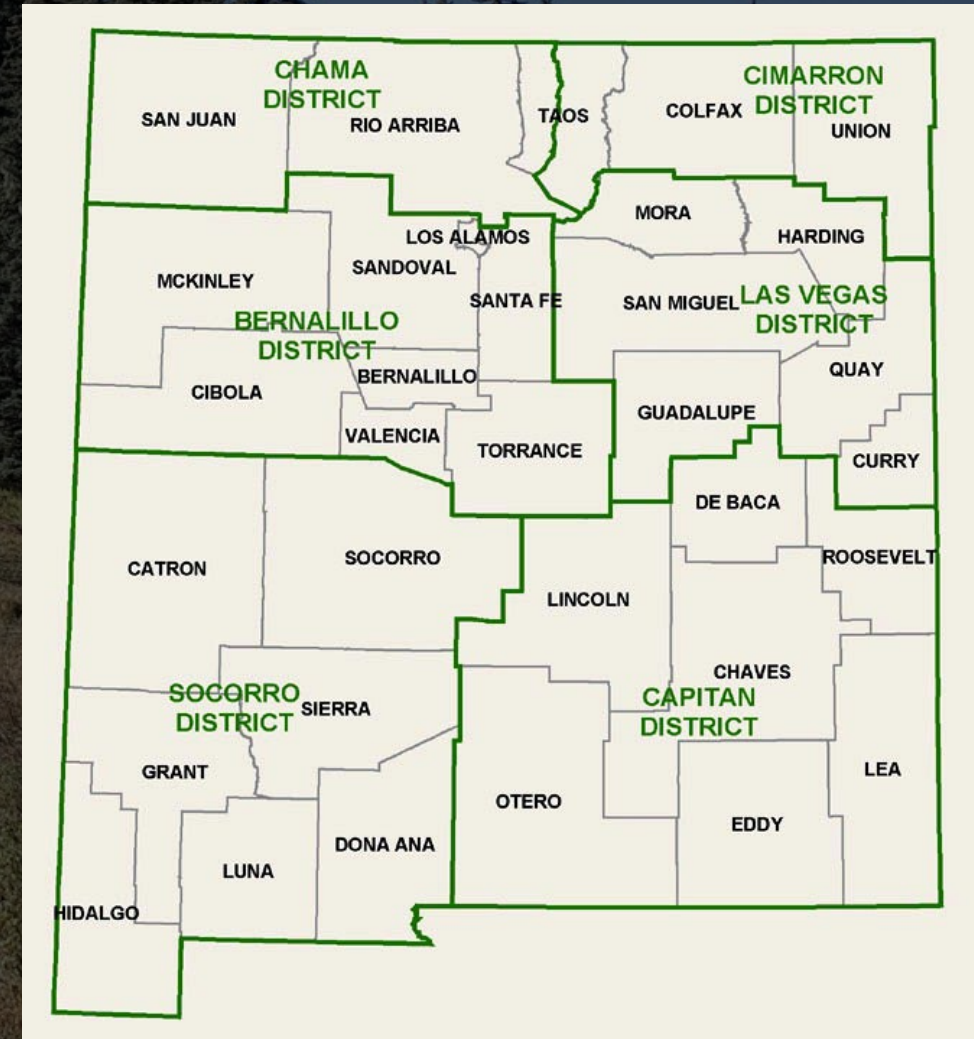
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FORESTRY DIVISION RESPONSIBILITIES

- **Wildfire suppression** on all non-federal, non-municipal and non-tribal land (~43M acres)
 - **Tree harvesting, fuels reduction and forest regeneration & restoration**
 - **Technical support** for forest landowners
- *The Forestry Division promotes healthy, sustainable forests and watersheds in New Mexico for the benefit of current and future generations.*



Policy Context

Historical Context:
Decades of aggressive fire suppression and a warming, drying climate contribute to larger, more severe wildfires across New Mexico.



2023: HB195 amends the Forest Conservation Act to provide the Forestry Division with authority to conduct post-fire restoration



2024: Salt & South Fork fires cause severe watershed damage; more federal disaster funding and first state appropriation to Forestry for post-fire slope stabilization



2022: Hermits Peak-Calf Canyon (HPCC) burns 341,735 acres



2023: USDA provides supplemental disaster funding for HPCC hazard tree work



South Fork Fire: The Incident

South Fork Fire – June 2024

- 17,000+ acres
- 1,400+ structures destroyed
- Ignition near central Ruidoso

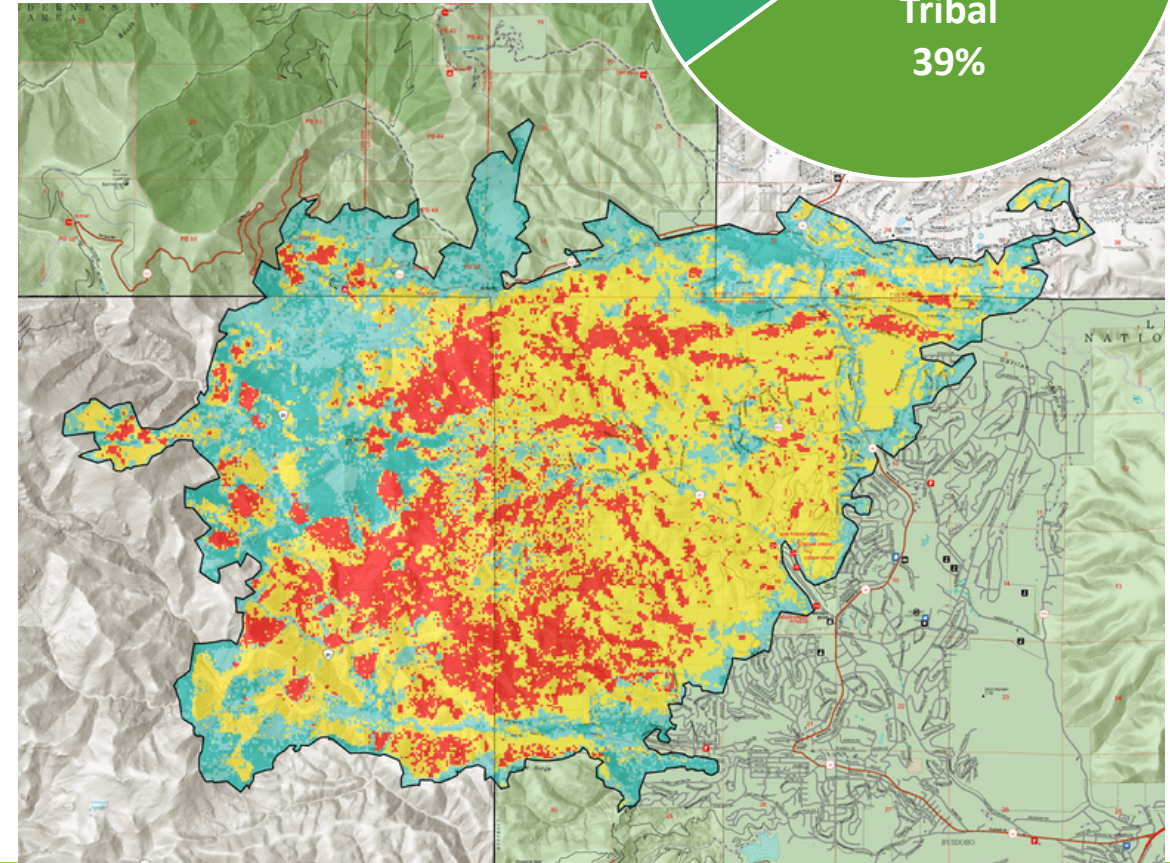
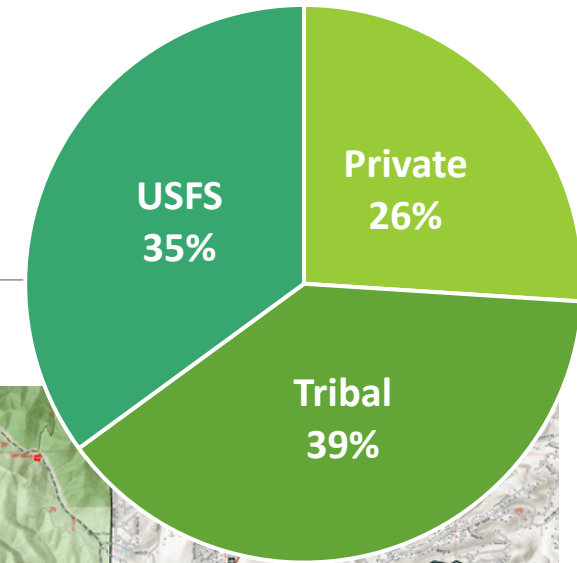
After the Fire

- High burn severity + early monsoons → flash flooding

Impact

- Homes, infrastructure, cultural sites
- Private-land help urgently needed

Impacted Ownership:



South Fork Fire: Debris Flow Mapping

Collaborative modeling

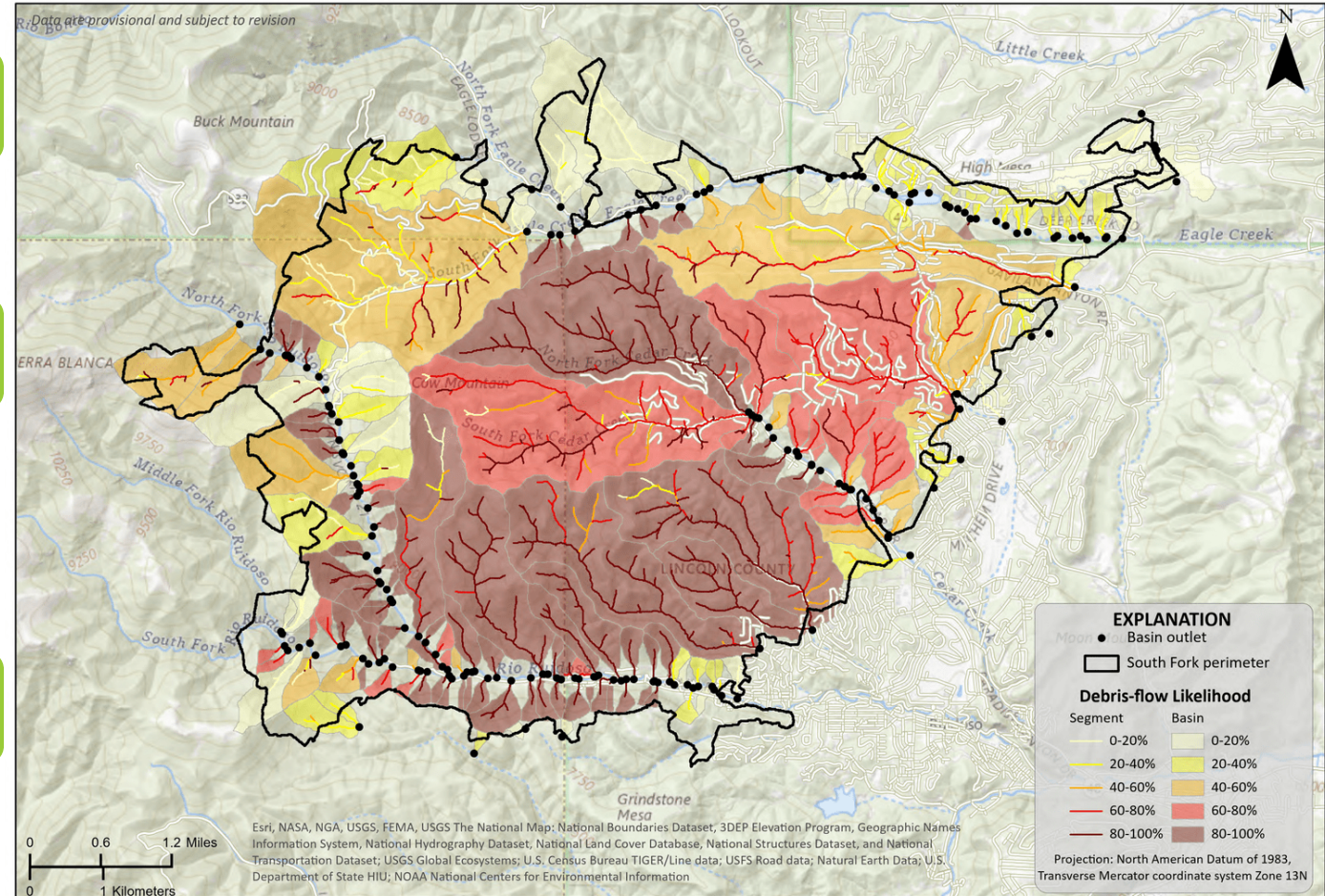
- ESRI, NASA, NGA, FEMA, USGS
- Data from many sources

Modeling is a planning tool

- Predicting where debris flows are most likely allows emergency responders to plan
- Guide for slope stabilization that starts at the top of watersheds

Impact

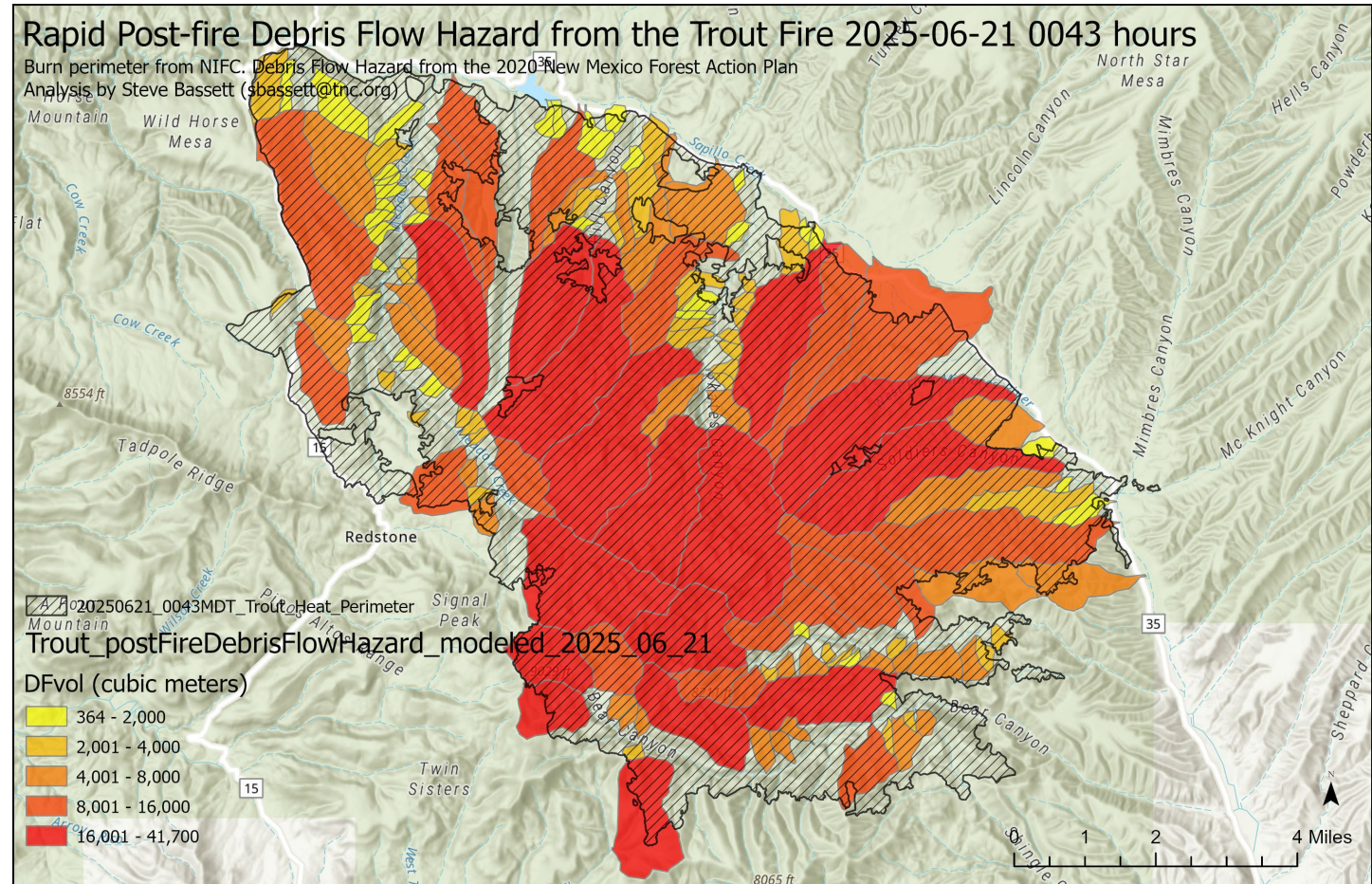
- 200+ homes lost to flooding
- Businesses, tourism and economy affected



2025 Trout Fire: Rapid Modeling of Debris Flow Potential

Learning from South Fork

- Modeling of debris flows started immediately after wetting rain in forecast
- Identified likely area for debris flows and flooding
- identified potential damage to roads, bridges, powerlines, and structures
- Emergency responders, utilities and NM DOT prepared
- No roads or structures lost to floods



Road to Private Land Recovery after 2024 South Fork Fire

The federal players:

- USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS): seeding and mulching, acequia repairs, and trash racks
- FEMA/ DHSEM: debris removal, hazardous-tree work, community-level infrastructure programs



Road to Private Land Recovery

Legislative Action in Special Session July 30, 2024:

- First dedicated state appropriation to EMNRD for post-fire recovery on private lands.
- \$10 million appropriation ***initial 1-year window*** and authorized extension to FY2026.
- Activities include: (1) private land recovery; (2) alluvial fan restoration with Mescalero Apache Tribe; and (3) DHSEM planning with lidar and modeling
- First lesson learned – one year for post-fire restoration planning and implementation is not realistic



Getting to Work

New Post-Fire Processes: enrollment, documentation, and implementation

Landowner Right of Entry: single signature gives the Forestry Division authority to implement work and manage contractors

Approved Practices: hazard tree removal, log erosion barriers, mulching, small rock structures

Process:



❖ The Forestry Division goal for private lands burned in the South Fork Fire is to balance speed, accountability, and landowner trust-building while stabilizing land to prepare for reforestation in 3-5 years.



Hazard tree removal (before and after)



Small rock structures to slow flows

Log erosion barriers & mulching







Partnerships

Contractor support for planning and implementation

NGO support

- **American Forests:** Reforestation planning to guide future work
- **South Central Mountain RC&D:** Local point of contact for community members and NRCS

Mescalero Apache Tribe: Forward-thinking recovery through natural infrastructure (e.g. alluvial fan restoration)





South Fork Post-Fire Recovery



~600 acres of watershed stabilization completed



200+ acres in progress



1,400+ acres assessed (out of ~4,300 affected)



180+ eligible landowners engaged



1 erosion control workshop



100% of funds for private lands encumbered in 2 years



100% of work by local contractors!

Forestry Division Post-Wildfire Coordination Website



<https://www.emnrd.nm.gov/sfd/post-wildfire-coordination/>